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Introduction to the PA CARES Program

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Executive Order 2025-02: Protecting Pennsylvanians' Health and Freedom by Ensuring Access to Safe and Effective Vaccines

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Safeguarding Vaccine Access for All Families.

- **WHO:** The Department of Health (DOH)
- **WHAT:** Establish a Pennsylvania based program to provide vaccines to those who are eligible for the federally supported Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, in the event that the ACIP removes or alters vaccine recommendations for certain diseases for the VFC program.
- Requires collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other leading medical associations.



Updating State Policies to Ensure Evidence-Based Vaccine Guidance.

- **WHO:** All Commonwealth agencies
- **WHAT:** Ensure state regulations, guidance, website materials, and public communications relating to vaccines are consistent with evidence-based recommendations endorsed by medical associations like the AAP, the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) etc.
- Update materials, if necessary, based on information from the medical associations and the guidance from DOH.



Ensuring Pennsylvanians Have Convenient Access to Accurate, Reliable Information about Vaccines.

- **WHO:** The Department of Health
- **WHAT:** Create a central website that will provide accurate, evidence-based information about vaccines, including information from leading medical associations.
- **STATUS:** Completed - website can be found here: www.pa.gov/vaccines
- Philadelphia providers should visit: <https://vaccines.phila.gov>



Working with Local, State, and National Leaders to Protect Vaccine Access.

- **WHO:** The Department of Health
- **WHAT:** Convene an advisory vaccine education workgroup chaired by the Secretary of Health (SOH) to provide input and recommendations on protecting vaccine access and promoting uptake.
- Meet at least on a quarterly basis.
- Include representatives from relevant state agencies and external stakeholders including primary care physicians, public health experts, local leaders, and community representatives.
- Collaborate with CMHDs and other states/jurisdictions including the Northeast Public Health Collaborative (NEPHC).



Providing Accurate Guidance for Medical Professionals.

- **WHO:** The Department of State – Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs and States Boards of Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, and Nursing
- **WHAT:** Continue to evaluate as necessary, the need for communications or policy statements to the Commonwealth's licensed health care professionals regarding vaccination schedules, consistent with the letters of support adopted by those boards on September 24 and 25, 2025. Meet at least on a quarterly basis.



Protecting Pennsylvanians Who Rely on Medical Assistance (Medicaid)

- **WHO:** The Department of Human Services (DHS)
- **WHAT:** Take all necessary steps, in accordance with the law, to ensure that the Pennsylvania Medicaid program covers, without cost sharing, all vaccines recommended by AAP, AAFP, or ACOG, in addition to those recommended by ACIP/CDC.



Guaranteeing Insurance Coverage for Vaccines

- **WHO:** The Pennsylvania Department of Insurance (PID)
- **WHAT:** Require that all health insurers operating under PID's authority continue to provide coverage for evidence-based vaccine recommendations endorsed by the country's leading national medical associations, including, but not limited to, AAP, AAFP, and ACOG, without imposing cost sharing, prior authorization, or other barriers, consistent with the Department of Health's guidance and the goals of this Executive Order.
- Monitor the compliance of the above.



Protecting Older Pennsylvanians

- **WHO:** The Department of Aging
- **WHAT:** Utilize the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly (PACE) program and any other relevant programs to ensure older adults have access to recommended vaccines.
- Direct all Area Agencies on Aging and affiliated service providers to disseminate accurate, up-to-date information on adult immunizations consistent with the DOH's guidance.



Safeguarding the Health of Pennsylvania's Students and Children in Child Care

- **WHO:** The Department of Health, The Department of Education (PDE), The Department of Human Services
- **WHAT:** Review all school and child care vaccination requirements and guidelines to ensure they consider evidence-based vaccine recommendations endorsed by the country's leading national medical associations.
- Communicate to parents and guardians that the Commonwealth's school-entry vaccine requirements and pediatric immunization recommendations remain in effect as a vital tool to protect children's health and safety in educational and child care settings.



PA CARES: Pennsylvania Children's Access to Routine and Essential Shots

What is PA CARES?

On October 1, 2025, Governor Shapiro signed [Executive Order 2025-02 – Protecting Pennsylvanians' Health and Freedom by Ensuring Access to Safe and Effective Vaccines.](#)

- Directive 1 establishes the Pennsylvania Children's Access to Routine and Essential Shots (PA CARES) Program.
- Ensures children in the Commonwealth who are eligible for the VFC Program keep access to necessary vaccines without cost sharing, if the CDC, with advisement of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), removes or alters vaccine recommendations for the VFC Program.



Who Can Enroll?

The PA CARES Program welcomes all providers enrolled in and in good standing with the VFC Programs of the PA Immunization Program and the Philadelphia Immunization Program.

- The PA DOH, Bureau of Immunizations (BOI), is working closely with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) to coordinate PA CARES Program provider enrollment.
- Due to concerns with potential changes to the ACIP recommendation for Hepatitis B vaccine, PA CARES urges all birthing hospitals to enroll as soon as possible and will be prioritizing enrollment for those providers.



PA CARES Enrollment Process

Provider Agreement

PA VFC and Philadelphia VFC providers sign and submit the PA CARES provider agreement. To reduce provider burden, information will be pulled from PA VFC and Philadelphia VFC enrollment / reenrollment submissions.

Vaccine Distributor

Some additional information, like physician license number, may need to be provided to the PA CARES vaccine distributor. Program staff will work with providers to collect this information, if necessary.

PIERS / PhilaVax

PIERS and PhilaVax staff will add PA CARES enrollment information into the appropriate immunization information system (IIS) to enable vaccine ordering.



PA CARES Timeline and Next Steps

Timeline for PA CARES Rollout

ACIP is scheduled to meet on December 4-5, 2025.

- Hepatitis B vaccine was on the agenda for the September 18-19, 2025, meeting, but following presentations and discussion, decisions and votes were tabled.
- Hepatitis B vaccine presentations and discussions will be on the agenda on December 4. Votes are scheduled for Hepatitis B vaccine and Hepatitis B vaccine for VFC that day.
- PA CARES has begun the enrollment process by sending out the provider agreement to our respective VFC provider networks.
- Enrollment of birthing hospitals and facilities will be prioritized to avoid any gap in the availability of Hepatitis B birth dose vaccine for infants supported by the PA VFC and Philadelphia VFC Programs, in the event that the ACIP votes to change this vaccine's schedule.



Available Provider Support

Further PA CARES information, education and training opportunities will be sent to Pennsylvania VFC and Philadelphia VFC providers as they become available.

- A PA CARES FAQ has been sent out to the respective Pennsylvania and Philadelphia networks and is available upon request. Updated versions with additional questions and answers will be released periodically.
- We are currently planning a routinely available PA CARES New Provider Enrollment webinar to be offered on a recurring basis.
- While PA CARES is a state-directed program, VFC providers within Philadelphia will continue to use PhilaVax. VFC providers in all other Pennsylvania counties will continue to use PIERS.
- A dedicated PA CARES resource account email has been created: RA-DHPACARES@pa.gov. Program questions can be directed to this email address. Please include site name and PIN in the subject line. All questions from Philadelphia providers can be sent to Vaccines@phila.gov. Please include "PA CARES" and the site name in the subject line.



Acronym Guide

- PA CARES = Pennsylvania Children's Access to Essential and Routine Shots
- EO = Executive Order
- DOH = PA Department of Health
- DHS = PA Department of Human Services
- PID = PA Department of Insurance
- PDE = PA Department of Education
- AAP = American Academy of Pediatrics
- AAFP = American Academy of Family Physicians
- ACOG = American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- VFC = Vaccines for Children
- CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- ACIP = Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
- BOI = Bureau of Immunizations (within DOH)
- PDPH = Philadelphia Department of Public Health
- IIS = Immunization Information System
- PIERS = Pennsylvania Immunization Electronic Registry System, PA's IIS
- PhilaVax = PDPH's IIS
- NEPHC = Northeast Public Health Collaborative





Pennsylvania
Department of Health

Discussion: questions, comments, and concerns

RA-DHPACARES@pa.gov

Vaccines@phila.gov